

# MISSOURI CAPITOL POLICE ADVISOR

630 West Main Street - Jefferson City, Missouri - (573) 751-2764



January 2016

## Operation T.O.Y.S.

Operation T.O.Y.S., a Jefferson City tradition, was a success again this holiday season. On Dec. 19, two local children rode along with Capitol Police officers for a Christmas adventure. As they journeyed to the eastside Walmart, the children were in control of the emergency lights, sirens, and the P.A. system. At the store, they were greeted by Santa as they began their shopping experience. Other agencies which participated included the Missouri State Highway Patrol, Cole County Sheriff's Department, Jefferson City Police Department and the Missouri Department of Corrections. A total of 77 children from economically disadvantaged families participated this year.

## Get Ready for More Pedestrians, Cares and Parking Demand

Capitol Police reminds employees to prepare for an increase in both pedestrian traffic and demand for parking as the 2016 legislative session begins Jan. 6.

### Spotlight:

Right of Way: Pedestrian vs. Motor Vehicle



Capitol Police reminds motorists and pedestrians of the rules regarding pedestrian right of way. The Missouri state statutes related to pedestrian right of way include:

### **Pedestrians' Right-of-Way in Crosswalks:**

[RSMo. 300.375](#) states that when traffic control signals are not in place or not in operation, the driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a crosswalk when the pedestrian is on the half of the roadway on which the vehicle is traveling, or when the pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger. No pedestrian shall suddenly leave a curb or other place of safety and walk or run into the path of a vehicle which is so close it is impossible for the driver to yield. Whenever any vehicle is stopped at a marked crosswalk or at any unmarked crosswalk at an intersection to permit a pedestrian to cross the roadway, the driver of any other vehicle approaching from the rear shall not overtake and pass the stopped vehicle.

### **When Pedestrians Shall Yield:**

[RSMo. 300.390](#) states that every pedestrian crossing a roadway at any point other than within a marked crosswalk or within an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection shall yield the right-of-way to all vehicles on the roadway.

### **When Pedestrians are prohibited from Crossing:**

[RSMo. 300.395](#) states that between adjacent intersections at which traffic control signals are in operation pedestrians shall not cross at any place except in a crosswalk. Furthermore, no pedestrian traffic shall cross at a roadway other than in a crosswalk in any business district or on any street designated by an ordinance.

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February 2016

## MCP Officer Named DPS Employee of the Month

Missouri Capitol Police Officer Charles Gerhart was selected as the January 2016 employee of the month for the Department of Public Safety. Officer Gerhart rescued a motorist from a burning vehicle caused by a motor vehicle accident. Officer Gerhart was off duty and traveling with his family when he spotted the crash scene. Instead of simply calling in the accident, he did what he was trained to do – serve and protect the citizens of Missouri. Congratulations Officer Gerhart and thank you for your service!

## Welcome Officer Delleart

Capitol Police has hired Andrew Delleart. Delleart will begin his career with MCP by completing his officer field training, and then he will be given his assigned shift placement. Welcome Officer Delleart.

### Spotlight:

### Winter Safety Tips for Snow & Ice



Recent winter weather has brought the typical problems related to snow and cold temperatures. The Division of Facilities Maintenance will continue to remove snow and use chemicals on parking lots and sidewalks to reduce slip and fall hazards. Remember if it melts today, it will freeze overnight. There are several things that can be done to reduce the risk of falling when slippery conditions exist. Here are some helpful tips:

- Wear boots or overshoes with grip soles such as rubber or neoprene. Slick leather or plastic soled shoes increase the risk of slipping.
- When getting out of your vehicle, look down at the ground. If it appears to be icy, you may want to park in a different spot.
- When entering or exiting vehicles, use the vehicle for support. Before standing, brace yourself with the vehicle door and seat back. This provides more stability.
- Don't walk with your hands in your pockets. This reduces the ability to use your arms for balance if you do slip. Keep your full attention on walking.
- Take short shuffling steps in very icy areas.
- When walking, curl your toes under and walk as flat-footed as possible.
- Don't step on uneven surfaces, such as curbing.

When these tips don't work, and you know you are going to slip or fall, try to reduce your potential for injury, by:

- Rolling with the fall. Try to twist and roll backwards, rather than falling forward.
- Relax as much as possible when you begin to fall.
- Drop items you may be carrying. Protect yourself, not the objects you're carrying.

If the sidewalks and walkways are impassable and you absolutely have to walk in the street, walk against traffic and as close to the curb as possible. Return to the sidewalk as soon as possible to avoid vehicles that could lose control.

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March 2016

## Avoiding Unnecessary Security Alarm Calls

Capitol Police has noticed an increase in security alarms on weekends and holidays, often when employees are working. To eliminate unnecessary officer responses, Capitol Police asks that employees ensure the alarm system is deactivated when entering an alarmed workspace when a building is closed. As a reminder, Capitol Police asks those of you who work after normal business hours to ensure doors close behind you and never allow another person to enter the building behind you.

## Avoiding Thefts from the Office

To deter theft, we ask all state employees remain vigilant by reporting suspicious activity in a timely manner and secure valuable belongings when stepping away from your work area.

## Lost and Found Property

Have you lost something recently? If so, please check with our communications staff to see if it has been turned in. To check to see if we have an item that belongs to you, stop by our communications window, located on the first floor of the Truman Building (next to the escalator), or you can speak to someone 24/7 by calling (573) 522-2222. If your item has not been turned in, you can request that you be contacted in the event it is located. Please provide your name, phone number and a description of the item.

## Spotlight:

## Medical Emergencies



If you or someone around you in the Capitol Complex needs immediate medical assistance, contact Capitol Police at (573)522-2222.

When speaking with the Communications Operator, it is helpful if the following information is provided:

- Location of the individual: If indoors – building, floor, room number, as well as best entrance to use. If outdoors – street address/block number, parking lot number or nearest landmark. (All Capitol Complex parking lots have an identifying number on light poles that can be used to identify the location).
- Individual's medical condition: Is the person conscious and alert? Breathing normally? Bleeding? Are there any known reasons for their condition, such as a fall, recent surgery or illness? To your knowledge, does the person have a history of this medical issue, diabetic, etc.?
- Victim's identification: Name, age, gender.

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April 2016

## New Communications Operator

Capitol Police welcomes Rhonda Wilson to the department. Operator Wilson will work in the Truman State Office Building Capitol Police Communications Center.

## Suspicious Activity

Capitol Police reminds everyone to contact us immediately if you observe suspicious activity. Call (573) 522-2222, and remember that details are important. Please report the specific suspicious activity, location, the number of people involved, physical descriptions, clothing descriptions, vehicle information and direction of travel if they are leaving the area. To view a count of Capitol Police suspicious activity calls and other Capitol Police activities, go to: <http://mcp.dps.mo.gov/activitiesarchive.html>.

## Spotlight:

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month



Distracted driving is a dangerous epidemic on America's roadways. In 2014, 3,179 people were killed, and 431,000 injured in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers.

Ten percent of all drivers 15 to 19 years old involved in fatal crashes were reported to be distracted at the time of their crashes. This age group has the largest population of drivers who were distracted at the time of a crash.

Across the U.S., at any given time during daylight hours, about 660,000 drivers are using cell phones or electronic devices while driving, a number that has held steady since 2010.

The top distractions during driving include:

- Texting: Because text messaging requires visual, manual and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction.
- Using cell phone or smart phone.
- Eating and drinking.
- Talking to passengers.
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps.
- Using a navigation system.
- Watching video.
- Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player.

Please visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) website for more information at <http://www.distraction.gov/>

Visit our home page at [WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV](http://WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV) for safety tips and more  
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May 2016

## Law Enforcement Memorial

Two moving ceremonies honoring law enforcement officers will take place at the Missouri Law Enforcement Memorial on the north side of the Capitol on Friday and Saturday, May 6 and 7. At 8 p.m. on Friday, a candlelight vigil will be held in honor of all Missouri law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty. At 10 a.m. on Saturday, law enforcement families from across the state will gather for the annual Law Enforcement Memorial Service. The names of three Missouri Law Enforcement officers who died in the line of duty in 2015 will be added to the memorial – Missouri State Highway Patrol Trooper James M. Bava, Harrison County Sheriff's Deputy Steven "Brett" Hawkins and Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Sergeant Peggy Vassallo – and the families of fallen law enforcement officers through the decades will gather and place wreaths at the memorial.

The memorial is dedicated to all Missouri law enforcement heroes who made the supreme sacrifice, to the family members of fallen officers, and to all members of law enforcement for serving and protecting the citizens of Missouri. The Department of Public Safety's [Law Enforcement Memorial Web page](#) includes a [searchable database](#) that allows you to locate each fallen officer's name on the memorial wall of honor.

## Spotlight:

## Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month



Motorcyclists will be out in force as the weather gets warmer, which is why May is the perfect month for Motorcycle Safety Awareness. Despite the danger, helmet usage is declining. All motorists need to know how to anticipate and respond to motorcyclists to avoid fatal crashes.

In 2014, 4,586 motorcyclists were killed in traffic crashes, a decrease of 2.3 percent from 2013, when 4,692 were killed in crashes involving motorcycles. Those deaths account for 14 percent of the total highway fatalities, despite motorcycle registrations representing only 3 percent of all vehicles in the United States in 2014. Injured motorcyclists also decreased from 93,000 in 2013 to 88,000 in 2014.

General tips for drivers on how to prevent a fatal crash with a motorcycle:

- Though a motorcycle is a small vehicle, its operator still has all the rights of the road as any other motorist. Allow the motorcycle the full width of a lane at all times.
- Always signal when changing lanes or merging with traffic.
- If you see a motorcycle with a signal on, be careful: motorcycle signals are often non-canceling and could have been forgotten. Always make sure the motorcycle is turning before proceeding.
- Check all mirrors and blind spots for motorcycles before changing lanes or merging with traffic, especially at intersections.
- Always allow more following distance – three to four seconds – when behind a motorcycle. This gives them more time to maneuver or stop in an emergency.
- Never drive distracted or impaired.

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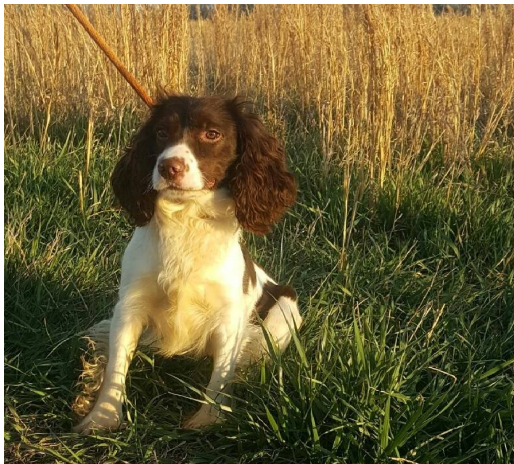
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June 2016

## K-9 Berbin

Missouri Capitol Police is pleased to welcome Berbin, our newest explosive detection K-9. Berbin and his handler, Officer Gregory McKinney, recently attended training in Kansas and obtained their certification in searching for and detecting explosives.



Berbin is a 2-year-old springer spaniel specially trained to detect explosive materials. The springer spaniel has an exceptional sense of smell, is agile and has a high work ethic. Springer spaniels are considered among the Top 10 breeds utilized for detection purposes, ranging from explosives to bed bugs.

Berbin and Officer McKinney's training was provided for by a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Officer McKinney and Berbin will serve alongside our other K-9 team, Officer DeAnne Bogg and Hutch.

## Salute to America 2016

This year's celebration will be held July 2-4. The Capitol will be open normal business hours on Saturday, July 2nd through Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. For information regarding activities go to: <http://salutetoamerica.org/>. For information on restrictions regarding the public use of state facilities go to: <http://s1.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/adrules/csr/current/1csr/1c35-1.pdf>.

## Spotlight:

## Workplace Safety, Security and Crime Prevention



By remaining vigilant, state employees can help reduce the likelihood of crime and violence in and around the workplace.

- Use your Prox ID Badge or code when accessing secure buildings and areas; don't allow others to "piggyback" behind you. If someone you don't recognize as a state employee enters after you, contact Capitol Police.
- Secure valuables when leaving your work area.
- Secure all doors, windows, cabinets/drawers at the end of the work day.
- Report suspicious activity as soon as possible; providing as much information as possible about the activity and possible suspect(s).
- If you fear someone from your personal life may try to harm you while you are at work, report the situation to your supervisor and/or law enforcement; you may also be interested in filing for an Ex Parte, or temporary protection order; This Missouri state courts [link](#) provides useful information.

Visit our home page at [WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV](http://WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV) for safety tips and more  
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July 2016

## Sign-Up for the MCP Advisor

If you do not receive the Missouri Capitol Police Advisor as an electronic document and would like to, please email Sergeant Brian Kempker at [brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov](mailto:brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov) and request to be added to the monthly distribution list.

### Spotlight:

Cars, Children and Heat Stroke



On average, 38 children die each year from heat-related deaths after being forgotten and trapped inside vehicles. More than half of these heat stroke deaths occur when a caregiver forgets a child is in the vehicle. Other incidents include children playing in unattended vehicles and becoming trapped inside or adults left the vehicle unattended for just a few minutes.

Vehicular heat stroke is largely misunderstood. Most parents believe they could never forget their child in a vehicle. In more than 50 percent of reported cases, the person responsible for the child's death unknowingly left them in the vehicle. Even the best of parents or caregivers can unknowingly leave a sleeping baby in a car, resulting in the child's death.

#### Contributing factors:

- Change in the adult's normal daily routine, lack of sleep, stress, fatigue and distractions can lead the caregiver to forget about the child.
- Rear-facing car seats prevent the adult from noticing the child in the seat.
- Children, especially infants, often fall asleep in their rear-facing safety seats, becoming quiet and not attracting attention.
- A child's body overheats three to five times faster than an adult's body.

#### The Greenhouse effect in vehicles:

- The inside of a vehicle heats up VERY QUICKLY. Even with windows cracked, temperatures can reach 125 degrees inside a vehicle in minutes.
- Cracking windows does not help slow the heating process or decrease the maximum temperature.
- 80 percent of the temperature increase happens in the first 10 minutes.

#### Prevention/Safety tips:

- Never leave children alone in or around cars.
- "Look before you Lock" – Get in the habit of always opening the back door to check the back seat before leaving your vehicle. Create a reminder to check the back seat by putting a cellphone, purse or brief case in the back seat next to the child.
- Keep your vehicle locked at all times, and car keys and remote openers out of reach of children.
- Call 9-1-1 immediately if you see a child alone in a car.
- Have your daycare call if you child has not been dropped off.

Visit our home page at [WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV](http://WWW.MCP.DPS.MO.GOV) for safety tips and more  
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August 2016

## Local Activities Bring Crowds to Capitol Grounds and Local Businesses

The Missouri Capitol building and grounds, along with local businesses in downtown Jefferson City, have recently become hot spots for new visitors and activities. Capitol Police reminds all state employees and visitors to state buildings and grounds to respect the property and ensure monuments are not marred by the placement of rocks or in searching for Pokémon characters. Please observe all posted speed limits, signs for building hours and restricted areas, as well as looking out for other participants and pedestrians. Also, players are reminded to stay alert at all times. Be aware of your surroundings and heed crosswalks and traffic signals as a pedestrian. Outdoor activities can be made safer by pairing up and staying in groups. If you plan to go into a secluded area or areas you are not familiar with try to do so with someone else.

**Pokémon Go** – A GPS location-based reality game application in which player try to locate, capture, battle and train virtual Pokémon characters.

**JC Rocks** – A local Facebook group which has inspired the artistic side of local residents, regardless of age. The concept, similar to hide-and-seek, involves hiding artistic treasures painted on rocks. The rocks are then hidden throughout the community for others to find. When a rock is found, you can leave it, re-hide it for others to find, or keep it for yourself replacing it with one of your own painted rocks.

### Spotlight:

### Back to School – Safety Tips for Motorists



#### Sharing the road safely with school buses

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, riding a school bus to school is 13 times safer than riding in a passenger vehicle and 10 times safer than walking to school. More children are hurt outside the bus than inside as passengers. Most of the children who lose their lives in bus-related crashes are pedestrians between the ages of 4 and 7, who are hit by the bus or motorists illegally passing a stopped school bus.

- School buses drivers use yellow flashing lights to alert motorists that they are preparing stop to pick up or drop off children. Red flashing lights and an extended stop sign arm signal to motorists the bus is stopped and children are getting on or off the bus.
- All 50 states require that traffic in both directions stop on undivided roadways when students are entering or exiting a bus.
- The area 10 feet around a school bus is where children are in the most danger of being hit. Stop your car far enough from the bus to allow children the necessary space to safely enter and exit the bus.
- Be alert. Children are unpredictable. Children walking to or from their bus are usually very comfortable with their surroundings. This makes them more likely to take risks, fail to look both ways or ignore hazards.

#### Sharing the road safely with child pedestrians

All drivers should recognize the special safety needs of pedestrians, especially children. Generally, pedestrians have the right-of-way at all intersections.

- Drivers should not block the crosswalk when stopped at a red light or waiting to make a turn. Do not stop with a portion of your vehicle over the crosswalk. Blocking the crosswalk forces pedestrians to go around your vehicle and puts them in a dangerous situation.
- In a school zone, when a warning flasher is flashing, you must stop and yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a marked crosswalk or at an intersection without a marked crosswalk.
- Always stop when directed to do so by a school patrol sign, school patrol officer or designated crossing guard.



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September 2016

## Missouri Capitol Police Customer Satisfaction Survey

Missouri Capitol Police would like your help. September kicks off the Capitol Police Department's annual customer satisfaction survey. The survey results help us review our service plan to ensure that all practices are up-to-date and effective. If you are registered to receive the Missouri Capitol Police Advisor, you will automatically receive an email with a link to the survey in mid-September. If you are not a subscriber but would like to complete the survey, email Sgt. Brian Kempker at [brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov](mailto:brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov) and include "survey" in the subject line.

## Missouri General Assembly Veto Session

The Missouri General Assembly will hold its veto session on Wednesday, Sept. 14. State employees working in the downtown complex should expect increased traffic and greater demand for parking.

Spotlight:	Suspicious Mail And Packages	
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It is important that every employee handling or receiving mail can identify a suspicious letter or parcel. Here are top indicators of suspicious parcels or letters:

- Excessive postage;
- Common words misspelled;
- No return address;
- Restrictive markings – such as "personal," "confidential," or "Do not X-ray";
- Unusual or inappropriate appearance:
  - Powdery substances can be felt through the package or can be seen on the outside;
  - Oily stains or package discoloration on the exterior of the package;
  - Foul odor;
  - Excessive packaging materials (tape or string);
  - Ticking sounds, protruding materials or exposed foil.

If you receive a package that appears suspicious, immediately leave the immediate area and contact Capitol Police for investigation.

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October 2016

## Missouri Capitol Police Customer Satisfaction Survey

Missouri Capitol Police would like to thank everyone who has participated in this year's annual customer satisfaction survey. The results will assist in MCP's regular review of its service plan to ensure the most effective practices are being utilized to respond to the needs of state employees. If you did not receive the survey, but would like to complete one, e-mail Sgt. Brian Kempker at [brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov](mailto:brian.kempker@dps.mo.gov) and include "Survey" in the subject line.

## The Great Central U.S. ShakeOut

At 10:20 a.m. on Oct. 20, millions of people in the Midwest and South-Central U.S. will "Drop, Cover and Hold On" for the Great Central U.S. ShakeOut, the region's largest earthquake drill. All state government agencies are encouraged to participate in the drill. For more information please visit: <http://www.shakeout.org/centralus/>

Spotlight:

Halloween Safety



MCP encourages parents to think ahead and do all they can to help ensure the safety of their children and all trick-or-treaters. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Clear yards and sidewalks of any obstacles or decorations that may be hard to see in the dark; keep houses well lighted, both inside and out.
- Children under 12 should not be alone at night without adult supervision. Children who are mature enough to be out without supervision should trick-or-treat in groups in well-lit areas.
- Avoid costumes that are too long or baggy and that cause a child to trip.
- If possible, choose light colored costumes for children and decorate costumes and bags with reflective tape or stickers; have children carry flashlights or glow sticks to be seen by drivers.
- Put down electronic devices, keep heads up and walk, don't run, across the street.
- Teach children to make eye contact with motorists, to use routes with the fewest street crossings and to always walk on sidewalks or paths when possible.
- Choose face paint or makeup over masks, which can obstruct a child's vision.
- Report any suspicious or criminal activity to your local police or sheriff's department.

In Jefferson City, a safe alternative to trick-or-treating is the Jefferson City Jaycees Trunk-or-Treat event. This year's event will take place on Saturday, Oct. 22 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Jefferson City Jaycees Fairgrounds. There is a \$1 admission charge per person, and all proceeds benefit "Operation T.O.Y.S."

A listing of other safe and fun fall events in the area can be found at

<http://www.visitjeffersoncity.com/events.php>

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November 2016

## Missouri River Bridge Reopening

The Missouri Department of Transportation has [announced](#) that both the westbound and eastbound Route 54/63 bridges are expected to be fully open to traffic by 6 a.m. on Monday, Nov. 14. MoDOT advises motorists to be alert to traffic pattern shifts beginning Friday evening, Nov. 11, to prepare for the return to normal traffic patterns:

- Starting at 6 p.m. on Friday, westbound traffic on the eastbound bridge will be reduced to one lane so the westbound bridge can be opened. All lanes of the westbound bridge will be open Friday evening. The access ramp from Route 54/63 to West Main Street and the westbound on-ramp from Route W to Route 54/63 will also open Friday evening.
- At about 7 p.m. on Friday, eastbound traffic will be reduced to one lane to allow workers to take down the concrete barriers separating the lanes, remove temporary striping and place new pavement markings. Eastbound Route 54/63 traffic will be down to one lane until Saturday evening.
- By 6 a.m. on Monday, both bridges are expected to be fully open, as will the access ramp from West Main Street to Route 54/63 and the eastbound on-ramp from McCarty Street to Route 54/63.

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

Capitol Police thanks everyone who participated in our 2016 Customer Satisfaction Survey. The survey is used to gauge satisfaction with our performance and better understand the concerns of the state employees we assist. The results have been compiled and will be used to guide us in better serving all state employees, state agencies and visitors to the Capitol Complex.

## Spotlight:

## Holiday Shopping Safety



With Christmas approaching, Capitol Police reminds everyone to keep a few safety tips in mind during the holiday season:

- When shopping, take only the credit cards and cash necessary for your planned purchases.
- Keep a written record of all credit card names and number in case of theft.
- Keep your receipts separate from your purchased merchandise. If stolen, you will have proof of purchase and ownership.
- Don't let the customer behind you make you feel rushed. Take the time to put your money, credit cards and receipts away before leaving checkout.
- Try to park in well-lighted areas with pedestrian activity, close to the store. Avoid areas near dumpsters or cargo trucks that may reduce visibility.
- Never leave packages, and personal items, such as purses, wallets, cash, credit cards, cell phones, etc., in view inside your vehicle. If shopping at multiple destinations, place purchases in the trunk of your vehicle prior to departing for the next business.
- Always lock vehicle doors and roll up windows.
- Always be aware of your surroundings, stay alert, and reduce distractions, such as using a cell phone while walking to your vehicle.
- Have your keys ready and in-hand when you leave the store, so you are not distracted while walking to your vehicle.

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December 2016

## Operation T.O.Y.S.

Each December, Missouri Capitol Police and other Mid-Missouri law enforcement agencies come together to provide Christmas cheer for children who otherwise might not receive gifts. The kids get to ride with officers in patrol vehicles and activate the lights and sirens as they travel from the Jefferson City Police Department to Jefferson City's Walmart East. There, they are greeted by Santa and his helpers. The children are teamed with an officer and get to pick out the toys or other gifts of their choosing. The event is scheduled for Dec. 17. Other local agencies participating in the event are the Missouri State Highway Patrol, Missouri Department of Corrections, Lincoln University Police Department, Jefferson City Police Department, and the Cole County Sheriff's Department.

## Prepare for More Pedestrians, Cars and Parking Demand

Capitol Police reminds employees to prepare for an increase in both pedestrian traffic and demand for parking as the 2017 legislative session begins Wednesday, Jan. 4.

## Inauguration of Missouri's 56<sup>th</sup> Governor

At noon on Monday, Jan. 9, Governor-elect Eric Greitens is scheduled to be sworn in on the Capitol's south steps as Missouri's 56<sup>th</sup> governor.

## Spotlight:

## Online Holiday Shopping Safety



With Christmas approaching, Capitol Police reminds state employees to keep a few online safety tips in mind during the holiday season:

- Look for https:// – the “s” stands for secure – in the URL whenever you are making a purchase online. Also, look for a padlock or similar icon in the web address to indicate you are on a safe site.
- Use anti-virus software and tools on all computers to detect and remove viruses and key loggers that can steal your identity when using debit and credit cards online.
- Use anti-phishing software – most reputable anti-virus programs contain anti-phishing software – and alerts that help detect phishing scams.
- Secure your home wireless network with a password to make sure others cannot access your personal information without your knowledge or permission.
- Choose a password that combines numbers, letters and symbols – the more complex the password, the better. Be sure to log off of websites after completing transactions.
- Take immediate action if you suspect identity theft. Contact your credit card company, bank and all three credit reporting agencies, as well as your local police department.